

Ex Parte Or Late Filed

UNITY: Journalists of Color, Inc.
1601 Kent Street, Suite 1003
Arlington, VA 22209

March 24, 2003

VIA Electronic Filing
Honorable Marlene Dortch
Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20054

Dear Ms. Dortch:

RE: MB Docket No. 02-277 (Review of the Commission's Broadcast Ownership Rules)

MM Docket No. 01-235 (Cross-Ownership of Broadcast Stations and Newspapers)

MM Docket No. 01-317 (Radio Broadcast Stations in Local Markets)

MM Docket No. 0-244 (Definition of Radio Markets)

The national organization UNITY: Journalists of Color, Inc., is asking the FCC to hold more public hearings at the local level on the Broadcast Ownership Rules and the related issues. Attached is a letter we wish to submit to the Commission and its chairman, Michael K. Powell, and the press release issued by UNITY on this matter.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Ernest R. Sotomayor
President, UNITY: Journalists of Color, Inc.

March 24, 2003

PRESS RELEASE

UNITY: Journalists of Color, Inc. seeks more hearings before FCC revises media ownership rules

Washington, D.C. -- The coalition that represents the four largest U.S. journalism organizations of color is asking the Federal Communications Commission to delay ruling on the six controversial proposals to loosen regulation and ownership restrictions of broadcast media in the United States.

In a letter on behalf of the organization to FCC Chairman Michael K. Powell, UNITY: Journalists of Color, Inc. expressed concern regarding the limited opportunity that the commission has provided for public input at the local level on this critical issue. UNITY is asking Powell to schedule and publicize a series of public hearings nationwide to allow the public, at a local level, to comment on and more fully understand the ramifications of the rule changes under consideration.

“Along with other organizations, we believe the FCC should provide ample opportunity for the public, which has much to gain or lose through the changes in the media ownership rules, to be a part of this complex discussion through additional hearings,” said UNITY President Ernest R. Sotomayor, who is Long Island Editor at Newsday.com in New York. “By convening a single public hearing on changes that have potential to substantially reshape the news media industry, the FCC is not serving the public’s interest.”

Only one public hearing has been held this year – in Richmond, VA, on Feb. 27 – to allow the public to appear before the commission.

The FCC is expected later this year to relax several longstanding policies limiting ownership of television and radio stations, a move that could unleash a wave of media consolidation. The FCC is considering changing or scrapping six critical rules covering media ownership, some dating back more than a half-century.

The FCC rule changes have the potential to affect thousands of jobs, including many held by journalists of color, as well as how news and information is reported to millions of American viewers, listeners and readers as the news media outlets are consolidated into fewer and more concentrated entities in local markets.

The UNITY alliance organizations are concerned that interested groups, especially those representing minority communities and constituencies, have not had sufficient time or ability to influence the process and to study the issue to ensure that consolidations will not reverse gains made in making the news media workforce more diverse, and that they do not skew coverage, particularly in communities of color.

At its most recent meeting in Fort Worth, UNITY’s board of directors overwhelmingly approved a motion directing an ad-hoc committee to analyze the pending rule changes and recommend a course of action to the full board.

“We believe that the interests of the public should be paramount as the FCC makes its decisions, and that would dictate the need to allow more comment,” Sotomayor said.

Earlier, UNITY alliance partners NAHJ (The National Association of Hispanic Journalists) and NABJ (The National Association of Black Journalists) have separately called for a delay in the process.

In its resolution, the NAHJ board last month called on the FCC to postpone its plans to issue rules this spring until it convenes more hearings in different parts of the country, and for media companies overall to provide greater news coverage on the issue.

A recent report by Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting revealed that since the FCC announced the review of the nation's broadcast ownership rules last September, ABC, CBS and NBC have done little to cover the issue. FAIR found only one network story on the issue: a short summary on ABC's World News This Morning that aired on Sept. 9 at 4:30 a.m.

UNITY: Journalists of Color, Inc. represents more than 7,000 members of the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ), the National Association of Hispanic Journalists (NAHJ), the Asian American Journalists Association (AAJA) and the Native American Journalists Association (NAJA). Member organizations jointly gather every five years for a national convention, with the next to be held August 4-8, 2004 in Washington D.C.

For more information contact:

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703 469-2100
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March 24, 2003

The Honorable Michael K. Powell
Chairman, Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

In the Matter of 2002 Biennial Regulatory Review - Review of the Commission's Broadcast Ownership Rules and Other Rules Adopted Pursuant to Section 202 of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 -- MB Docket No. 02-277

Chairman Powell:

On behalf of UNITY: Journalists of Color, Inc., a coalition representing the four largest journalism organizations of color in the United States, we hereby request that the Federal Communications Commission delay its plans to promulgate new rules this spring on regulation and ownership restrictions of broadcast media in the United States.

UNITY, representing more than 7,000 journalists of color, is concerned that the process of revising these rules, while having allowed for written public comment, has not provided ample opportunity for people at the local level, particularly in communities of color, to offer input.

We hereby request that, in the interest of ensuring a broader and more diverse dialogue on this complex matter, you schedule and publicize a series of hearings nationwide to allow the public to comment on and more fully understand the ramifications of revising rules that have the potential to substantially reshape the nation's new media industries.

We believe the public's interest is paramount since it has the most at stake in any future changes within the news media, and it is our position that convening a single public hearing for public participation does not adequately serve the public good.

Chairman Powell, you have expressed that the rule changes will be among the most sweeping ever when it comes to the news media, and it is clear that they have potential to affect thousands of jobs, including many held by journalists of color, and to affect the presentation of news and information disseminated to millions of American viewers, listeners and readers.

The UNITY alliance organizations are concerned that interested groups, especially those representing minority communities and their constituencies at the local level, have not had sufficient time or ability to influence the process. Further, we believe more time is needed to study the issue to ensure that consolidations will not reverse gains made toward making the news media workforce more diverse, and that they do not skew coverage, particularly in communities of color.

Our concerns follow an erosion of representation of people of color in major parts of the broadcast media industry. According to the 2002 annual survey by the Radio and Television News Directors Association, the representation of people of color in local broadcast newsrooms declined from 24.6 in 2001 to 20.6 in 2002. We remain concerned about the diversity at the national level, as well, but similar data is not available for the networks, since they do not participate in the RTNDA annual census. It is widely acknowledged, however, that the networks have made little progress on this front, and no measures under FCC rules now address this lack of diversity.

At its recent meeting in Fort Worth, UNITY's board of directors overwhelmingly approved a motion directing an ad-hoc committee to analyze the pending rule changes and recommend a course of action to the full board.

We also join in the request made earlier this year by UNITY alliance partners NAHJ (The National

Association of Hispanic Journalists) and NABJ (The National Association of Black Journalists), calling for a delay in the process.

UNITY: Journalists of Color, Inc. represents more than 7,000 members of the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ), the National Association of Hispanic Journalists (NAHJ), the Asian American Journalists Association (AAJA) and the Native American Journalists Association (NAJA). Member organizations jointly gather every five years for a national convention, with the next to be held August 4-8, 2004 in Washington D.C.

UNITY's mission is to work to ensure fair and accurate news coverage of communities of color, and ultimately, the changes the Commission is preparing to make should work toward that goal as well. As such, we offer our expertise in diversity of the news media as a resource for the FCC on this matter.

Thank you for consideration of this request.

Respectfully submitted,

Ernest R. Sotomayor
President, Board of Directors
UNITY: Journalists of Color, Inc.

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cc: Commissioners Kathleen Q. Abernathy; Michael J. Copps; Kevin J. Martin; Jonathan S. Adelstein